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ABSTRACT

Based upon Maslow's hierarchy of human needs, interpersonal attraction (any personal relationship characterized by love and affection; husband-wife, parent-child, friendship) can be seen as the mutual meeting of emotional needs, especially at the fourth level (love needs) and the fifth level (esteem needs). These levels are differentiated into 10 specific needs (visual pleasure, attention, admiration, affection, companionship, understanding, acceptance, closeness, permanence, and appreciation), which are then analyzed by each individual in the relationship and communicated, with the help of the counselor, to the other. Program format includes short exposition and discussion, followed by a demonstration of the model using participant volunteers. (Author)

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A CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF INTERPERSONAL ATTRACTION (CENTERS' INSTRUMENTAL THEORY) USEFUL IN MARRIAGE AND FAMILY COUNSELING

(Program presented at the annual meeting of the National Council on Family Relations, New York City, October 19-23, 1976)

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ABSTRACT

Based upon Maslow's hierarchy of human needs, interpersonal attraction (any personal relationship characterized by love and affection; husband-wife, parent-child, friendship) can be seen as the mutual meeting of emotional needs, especially at the fourth level (love needs) and the fifth level (esteem needs). These levels are differentiated into ten specific needs (visual pleasure, attention, admiration, affection, companionship, understanding, acceptance, closeness, permanence, and appreciation), which are then analyzed by each individual in the relationship and communicated, with the help of the counselor, to the other. Program format will be short exposition and discussion, followed by a demonstration of the model, using participant volunteers.

. . . . . .

The above program being more experiential than didactic, and the presenter being a practitioner rather than a research theoretician, I am not providing you herewith a completed paper prepared for publication; these are summarized notes from the expository part of the presentation.

As a participant here, you will have experienced parts of the application of the theory as I use it in counseling. You will have brought with you your own needs, both personal and professional; you will have had them met to whatever extent you, your partner, and the encounter provided. My hope for you is that it may have been useful, that you may have enjoyed as well as learned from it. What you experienced here you will always have with you; you may lose these ntoes and this bibliography, but compulsive teacher that I am, I must provide them.

During the nearly thirty years of my adult, professional life as a teacher and a counselor, I have been more involved with practice than with research, with marriage-building (or rebuilding) than theory-building, but throughout those years I have been concerned with the theoretical framework underlying practice, especially my own practice. As a good pragmatist, I have been concerned mainly with "what works," and as an avowed eclectic and experimentalist, I have been more than willing to try and to use almost any technique or procedure which seemed to have sprung from a reasonable theoretical base.

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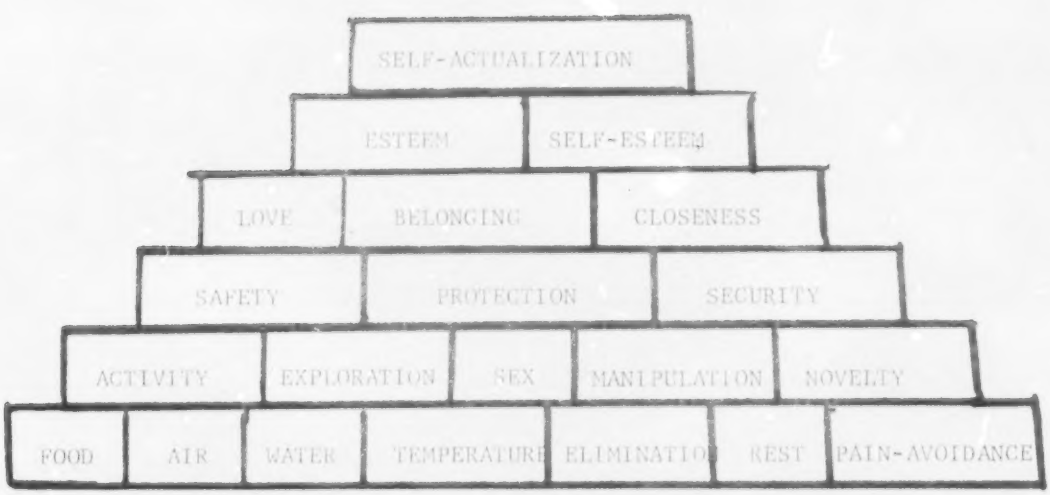
My interest in theories of interpersonal attraction has several sources. As a marriage counselor, which is of course generally remedial rather than preventive work, in seeking to help couples find "what went wrong" and to do something about it, I have been inevitably lead, as I'm sure you have, back to the concept of human needs, in this case, unmet human needs. This has included individual and role expectations, study of areas of marital conflict, theories of attraction and repulsion in human relations, and finally, an application of whatever findings in all of the above to marriage counseling. From the various theories, I have sought to build my own theoretical framework, and what I have found most useful as a counselor is a background of needs gratification theory, exchange theory, and my own extension of instrumental theory, that of Richard Centers of UCLA. Centers calls his theory "instrumental" in the sense of "man's use of woman, and woman's use of man," but in essence it is an exchange theory of instrumental need gratification. He says, "It is what is exchanged and the means and mechanisms by which the exchange is accomplished that is conceived of as the key to understanding intersexual attraction."[1]

Theories of interpersonal attraction all deal with who likes whom, how, under what conditions, when, and most of all why. Social psychological researchers have dealt with this phenomenom from many and varying aspects: the mechanics and dynamics of intrapersonal and interpersonal motivation, studying the complex behavior of mate selection and friendship choice, and through the study of all the recognizable and definable dynamics of groups.

There are six major propositions which provide the conceptual framework of Centers' instrumental theory, and since my own extension of his theory is what I am going to share with you as useful in counseling, I would like to briefly go over these propositions. They are:

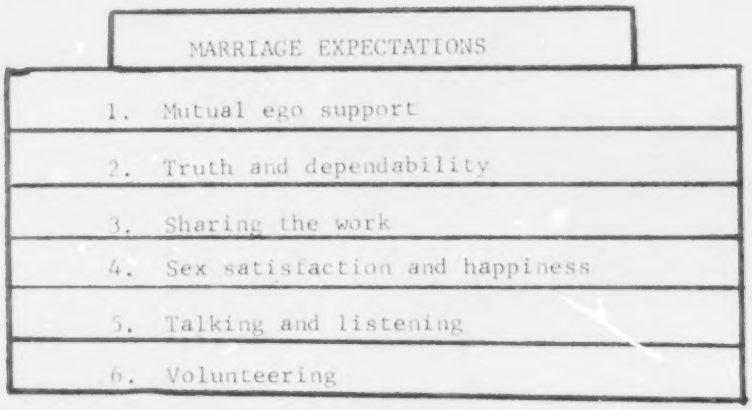
1. Human groups are originally established as a consequence of human interdependency for the gratification of biological drives: especially those for sexual satisfaction, nourishment, and survival support (protection against predators, provision for the dependent young, etc., provision of food, shelter, etc., in infancy).

We can see that this first proposition has as its general base Maslow's well-known concept of the hierarchy of human needs, as illustrated:[2]



2. As groups expand and become stably institutionalized as societies, rules and norms of behavior become established as means of insuring their continuation.

Here I want to share with you another chart which I find useful, having to do with marital expectations and norms. It is an adaptation of Leonard Benson's "marriage work" concept.[3]



3. Social motivation and interpersonal needs of all sorts are consequents of continued human interaction in groups and the institutionalization of a host of behavioral interrelations norms, including those of reciprocity (reciprocal obligation, fair exchange, etc.).

4. Interpersonal needs, themselves developing as consequents of these processes, and being only gratifiable by human association, interaction, and interchange, become at a more evolved state of human existence an additional basis for the establishment and maintenance of all groups of whatever kind. The intersexual dyad and marital union is simply the most necessary and important kind of group so originating. Friendship and larger recreational, economic, political, religious, and other types of affiliation are all need-instigated and need-gratification based associations, each given its particular character in terms of the kinds of needs for which its existence serves as the vehicle of gratification.

5. Explanation and understanding of interpersonal and group relations, including attraction and repulsion, superordination and subordination, (status and power relationships) and other phenomena are to be found in the principles of intermotivational mechanics and dynamics that are instrumental in the reciprocal need gratification of persons.

6. Social interaction and interpersonal behavior may be conceived of as an exchange process wherein individuals seek to use and do use each other of the gratifications of their needs. When there is a mutually gratifying use of each other (positive exchange) the result is attraction, liking, and love. When there is either mutual or one-sided frustration of needs (negative exchange) the result is repulsion and hate. Where no exchange of gratifications or frustrations results from our encounters, we experience merely disinterest and apathy.

In intersexual dyad formation each person seeks, among his circle of acquaintances, within the compass of his self-acknowledged compeers, to form a relationship with that person or those persons whose behavioral and other resources provide (or are perceived to provide) maximum gratification and minimum punification for his needs.

1. The Need for Sexual Gratification
2. The Need for Affectionate Intimacy--Affiliation
3. The Need for Maintenance and Enhancement of Sexual Identity + Role
4. The Need for Interpersonal Security
5. The Need for Self Esteem

EMOTIONAL NEEDS MET IN HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

1. Visual Pleasure

Visual pleasure, or "liking what we see," is one of the first components of attraction. It is a difficult need to define, varying as it does in intensity and range among all individuals. To a great extent, its source is physical appearance, but not totally physical appearance; it includes a non-corporeal element. Beauty is indeed in the eye of the beholder, but all beholders seem to have some need for visual pleasure, however much individual variation there is in the strength of the need and the range of objects which meet it. When this need is met in human associations, we are attracted to the person who meets it. We see a stranger across a crowded room; we thing, "That looks like the kind of person I would like to get to know." Beautiful, cute, pretty, handsome, attractive, lovely, distinguished-looking---what a wealth of adjectives we use describing persons who meet our needs for visual pleasure!

However, the need for visual pleasure, although one of the first needs met in the building of a relationship, is a fragile and sometimes transitory one if not rapidly followed by the meeting of succeeding needs such as attention and admiration. If we like the looks of the stranger across the crowded room, and impelled by this pleasure, go over and introduce ourselves, and are then ignored, initial attraction can turn into repulsion because of the unmet attention need, which causes anger, or hurt, or maybe even a little wistful sorrow for "what might have been." Generally, in the building of human relationships, needs-meeting has to some degree to be reciprocal, or mutual, in each step of the process.

The need for visual pleasure, while it may be more apparent in the initial stages of human relationships, is a continuing one. What marriage counselor has not heard as a part of the description of later disenchantment with wife or husband: "She's just let herself go," or "He doesn't seem to care what he looks like anymore, goes around unshaven and in those old clothes!"

The need for visual pleasure can be seen in the parent-adolescent child relationship, unmet for the parent who complains "s/he <u>looks</u> so horrible now: hair long and stringy (or unkempt and bushy); dirty jeans, with too-long frayed pants-legs; too much garish make-up!" Of course there are a lot of

other unmet needs heard in the above, mainly acceptance (rejection) and understanding (frustration), but visual pleasure has obviously been replaced by visual pain.

Human needs, especially emotional needs, are never static, but constantly changing, ebbing and flowing, varying. In the growth of human relationships, the need for visual pleasure quickly recedes in importance and primacy, but remains.

2. Attention

The need for attention has much of its origin in the almost total dependency needs of infancy. The attention the human infant receives from parents or other care-givers is necessary for survival, but also for the intellectual and emotional stimulation necessary to grow toward self-actualization, the realization of human potential.

Attention as a continuing need throughout the lifespan is a factor of attraction. As all emtional needs, it varies from individual to individual, fluctuates in time, and is manifested differently in each relationship.

Continuing my illustration of the growth of a typical heterosexual relationship, let us follow the attraction-pattern of the young couple who met at a social gathering, one of whom saw the "stranger across the crowded room" and was attracted to him/her through having his/her need for visual pleasure amply met. In this day of changing sex-role relationships, in which women are meeting fewer negative social sanctions for displaying the initiative in social relations, let us assume that it was Mary who first saw John and liked what she saw. She goes across the room and begins a conversation with him. His need for visual pleasure being also met by Mary, he responds to the attention Mary is giving him by giving her his own close attention, thereby meeting her need for attention. Result: animated conversation, and the beginning of a relationship.

It might be noted that both the initiation and the continued growth of relationships are dependent upon mutual needs-meeting. When one meets another's need without sufficient reciprocation, in common parlance, "it cools the ardor;" in terms of the behaviorists, "that behavior is extinguished." For the sake of the illustration, we will let Mary and John's relationship proceed apace.

3. Admiration

Esteem, respect, and regard are all commonly used synonyms for admire, but I prefer admire of the four terms as it implies liking and affection as well as approval, all important correlates in personal relationships.

The need for admiration is the need to feel worthy, "looked up to," "thought well of." The relationship of John and Mary becomes a mild "mutual admiration society" at this stage; they each find in the other many qualities to admire as they become further acquainted. As is also true in courtships, they tend to ignore or not to see any less-admirable qualities.

The need for attention can be met through as many non-verbal behaviors as verbal; the need for admiration needs more verbal expression. One seems

to need to hear admiring comments as well as receive admiring glances. In marriage, the later stages of a relationship, this is one need often overlooked. A great deal of relationship conseling (parent-children as well as spouse-spouse) consists of helping people learn to (1) identify their own needs in this particular relationship, (2) communicate their needs to the other person in clear and constructive, rather than destructive, language, and (3) change their own behaviors so as to meet both their own and the other person's needs.

I find this theoretical framework of ten basic needs both easy to teach and easy to learn, and equally applicable to all human relationships. I have used it both individually and in groups, of engaged or dating couples, married couples, and parent-child relationships. The needs vary with the relationship, but seem to some degree to be present in all.

4. Companionship

During the mate-selection years of dating and courtship, the need for companionship of one's peers, of both the same sex and the opposite sex, is probably at its height, especially in the areas of recreation and "free time." The need for companionship, like all other needs, varies both among individuals and within individuals, but continues in some form and with varying intensity through life.

The need for companionship is the need to talk and to listen, to be near, to share experiences. It implies a compatibility of interests, and of preferences. John and Mary, who met and liked each other at the party, who paid each other attention and obviously admired each other, make arrangements to continue their relationship. They begin spending a lot of their free time with each other; they talk a lot, do a lot of things together, mainly recreational. The relationship grows, as they mutually meet their needs for companionship.

Variation of intensity of this need among spouses can often cause conflict within the marriage, especially noticeable in the traditional marriage partnership of breadwinner husband and homemaker wife. The husband may get much of his companionship need met by his associations with people in his work; the wife in her more isolated and confined work-role at home may not.

Again, an understanding of ones own needs for companionship and the needs of the other person in the relationship is necessary, and then some sort of compromise, of working out ways to at least partially meet both needs.

5. Affection

The need for affection, to be treated kindly, gently, thoughtfully, and fondly, is especially apparent in the human young, but remains in all human relationships. Affection helps to banish fear, increases the necessary feelings of safety and security. In spite of sex-role socialization which reinforces the need in females and attempts to extinguish it in males, the need for affection would seem to be equally strong in both sexes, however repressed or denied.

In human sexual behavior, the need for affection is an integral part. Sexual needs are both physical and emotional, and the emotional need most often

associated with sex is affection.

John and Mary, spending a lot of time together and finding themselves compatible and this time very satisfying, inevitably become fond of one another. This fondness shows in their behavior toward each other; there is a mutual meeting of the need for affection.

6. Understanding

The need for understanding, as all of the emotional needs met in human relationships, has two components: both a need to understand the other person in the relationship and to be understood. This need, like affection, is related to fear reduction; if we understand and are understood this greater knowledge gives greater protection; knowledge is power.

Reiss's (1960) wheel theory of attraction and relationship building[4] details the sequence as Rapport → Self-Revelation → Development of Mutual Habits and Dependency → Personality Needs Met, and Borland's (1975) extension of this theory to a clockspring alternative, simply suggests a continuing circular motion.[5] It is easy to see how the ten emtional needs under discussion here underlie the progression of each of these steps, and especially the need for understanding, which is also closely related to the need for acceptance. Although related, and often linked together almost as one need, understanding and acceptance are separate in the sense that one can understand behavior but still not accept it, and likewise, one can learn to accept some things though never really understanding them.

Nevertheless, the need for understanding is a basic need in human relationships. Who has not met the spouse (and the teenager!) whose anguished cry is "She/he just doesn't understand me!"

7. Acceptance

The British have a phrase descriptive of a person with all his/her human frailties: "warts and all." The need for acceptance is the need to be liked, and admired, and treated kindly and affectionately, in spite of all of our weaknesses and faults, "warts and all." To be accepted for what we are, not held up to unattainable expectations; to be valued for our strengths and forgiven our weaknesses: this is the human need for acceptance.

Conditional love is love without acceptance; Rogers' "unconditional positive regard" includes it integrally.[6]

John and Mary, as their relationship develops, come to accept each others faults as well as their admirable virtues. Nobody's perfect.

8. Closeness

The need for closeness is both physical and emotional. Physically it is the basic human sexual need; emotionally it is the need for close primary relationships. The need to be first to someone else, to belong to them, not in the sense of possession but of closeness, is probably the need which has made and kept some form of monogamy the dominant marital relationship among human societies.

Marriage counselors are all familiar with the sad refrain, "We've grown apart; we don't feel close to each other any more." The need for closeness seems to grow stronger with time in good relationships; maybe it is that we cling together as we approach the unknown darkness.

We have seen the mutual meeting of needs in John and Mary's relationship up to this stage. Now the need for closeness becomes more urgent, more to the fore.

9. Permanence

A lot of young people shy away from the word permanence these days; they prefer commitment. Whatever one calls it, it is the need to have some sense that this relationship will last, that it can be depended upon. The need for permanence is the need for continued need satisfaction. We have a great sense of emotional well-being and satisfaction in a good relationship which is meeting all of the first eight needs, some perhaps minimally, others maximally, so naturally then comes this need for permanence, to insure (hopefully) their continuance.

The need for permanence is a part of Maslow's third level needs for safety and security, as well as underlying the love and esteem levels. We get married for many reasons, one of them being to secure, through exchange of personal promises and public commitment, the relationship which is gratifying through the meeting of emotional needs.

At this stage, our John and Mary feel a need for permanence, which leads to thoughts of marriage, which leads to commitment (if not always permanence).

10. Appreciation

The need for appreciation messes up the neat sequence of my theory of attraction, love, and interpersonal relationships, as it is really a basic need which underlies and is also a part of all the other needs I've discussed. (Remember I'm only in the process of building this theory, being probably pretty far away from completion of it. But finding it useful in understanding human relationships, even in its unfinished state.)

Needs-meeting in any relationship is not easy, either getting our own met or meeting those of others. And if we make that effort and meet another's needs, we want appreciation for it. We are somehow taught that this is selfish, that we should do things freely with no thought of reward or gain, that the highest form of love is absolutely selfless love. I've never been able to quite feel or understand that completely, probably because of my clay feet. Anyway, in my theory, it's okay to have a need for appreciation. And appreciation is like admiration in that it depends a great deal on verbal expression.

The need for appreciation seems to be especially strong in the long-term commitment of the marriage relationship. Marriage in itself is not easy, and I suppose the difficulties make one need appreciation, and expressed appreciation, more than ever. It is a need I often find un-met in unhappy couples in counseling; one that it is most important to identify, to accept without guilt or denial, and to communicate.

These then are the ten emotional needs in my own conceptual model of interpersonal attraction, having as their basis, and being an extension of, Center's instrumental theory. I find them useful in understanding human relationships, and as a framework for counseling. My hope is that they might in some way also be useful to you.

FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES

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